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ABSTRACT

The Metropolitan Youth Education Center's program is designed to help high school dropouts and the unemployed or under-employed whose problems are attributable to educational deprivation. The educational program is highly individualized. Each student program is developed to meet the personal goals, time available, ability and achievement level of the student. Within this framework the Center provides basic education, the prerequisite experiences to qualify for a diploma or to participate in the General Educational Development Test (GED), as well as training in employable skills. The students participating in this program range from 16 to 26 years of age. Their predominant academic deficiencies fall in the area of reading problems. Counseling services include personal, academic, social, and vocational counseling which focuses on the establishment of realistic goals and self-concepts for progress into adult society. Some of the problems of maintaining the program are funding, high student turnover and poor transportation to the four geographic locations. However, within a 12-month period 204 students successfully completed the GED, 258 students received formal high school diplomas and 68 students successfully participated in a Cooperative Work Study Program. (Author)

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DENVER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

METROPOLITAN YOUTH EDUCATION CENTER

1420 Kalamath Street
Denver, Colorado 80204

3555 Pecos Street
Denver, Colorado 8021.

5590 West Twentieth Avenue
Edgewater, Colorado 80214

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HISTORY AND GENERAL BACKGROUND

The Metropolitan Youth Education Center was conceived in early 1964 as a joint metropolitan effort of the Denver and Jefferson County Public Schools. The program was brought into being to work with the high school dropouts and the unemployed or under-employed whose problems were attributable to educational deprivation.

The educational program is highly individualized. Students may start at any point and time and each student program is developed to meet the personal goals, time available, ability and achievement level of the student. In the inception of the program we anticipated giving a number of short courses, with a view of preparing individuals for immediate employment. As we explored the need of students we found that the demands of industry concentrated heavily on the completion of the high school diploma requirements, or the high school diploma equivalency, as a basic screening tool for employment. Therefore, as we have progressed, our program has been developed to provide basic education, the capability to qualify for a diploma or participate in the General Education Development Test (GED) for the award of the high school diploma equivalency, as well as generate employable skills.

Throughout all planning we have avoided, wherever possible, the duplication of any existent facility or service that can meet the need of these students, such as mental health, welfare services, health services, sheltered workshop, etc.

Our first objective with each student is to try to get him/her back into the normal stream of education, and each year we have a number who complete their work through intensive participation and return to school without the loss of a

full school year. In every case, on initial contact, we explore the possibility of the student returning to the regular high school if and when at all feasible. The students are instructed, upon enrollment, that "they may proceed at their own rate of speed". By this statement we mean that the student who has not been successful in completion of the work incident to earning a normal high school credit, within 90 or 180 hours, may pursue this work as many hours additionally as necessary to be successful. In reality, we try to "deny the students the right to fail", but rather build on a basic philosophy that so long as they are associated with the Center they will experience educational success and acquire knowledge and skills essential for life adjustment.

We do not issue diplomas, but rather send the credit to the last school attended for the issuance of the diploma. This avoids the life-long identification of the student as a school dropout. Many students have, for a variety of reasons, been forced to leave the Center but repeatedly return as their personal situation allows continued accommodation of their educational needs. The student may return and pick up his individual program with as minimum review as necessary to progress satisfactorily. They are not restricted in terms of school announced rules concerning dress, attendance, smoking, discipline, etc., but rather are told that we expect them to exercise such control as young adults.

Throughout the history of our operation we have functioned successfully in providing educational opportunities for a number of personnel associated with the Office of Economic Opportunity Programs, including Manpower Development and Training, Title V (Head of Families), and Neighborhood Youth Corps. We have provided training opportunities for many young mothers whose children are on Aid to Dependent Children, and veterans who may continue work toward their high school

diploma without depleting their Veteran entitlement.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

We provide a broad offering in English, math, social studies, and reading improvement. We do not provide laboratory science but do offer a one unit experience in Life Science, using the community as a laboratory. It is our belief that the reading improvement program has been the most significant single contribution to the restoration of academically handicapped to their maximum development potential. Reading dysfunction is generally basic to poor study habits, excessive study time and minimal results or failure in all academic areas. Correction of techniques in this area has been the foundation for virtually fantastic improvement in many cases.

It is our intent, with all subjects offered, to make realistic appraisal of the student's existing educational background and capacity, and provide a worthwhile learning experience for him from that point forward. The range of student ability requires that course material may involve extremely basic education for one student, while, for another, it may represent the conclusion of a conventional accelerated college-bound program.

We have a diversified art program structured to give the student both exploration of the field and development of employable skills. The art program has proved very valuable in terms of interest-holding potential.

We offer vocational training in the following areas:

1. Auto mechanics
2. Business education
   a. Typing
   b. Bookkeeping
   c. Business machines
   d. Transcription

3. Clothing design
4. Drafting
5. Welding
6. Electronics

Additionally we follow many of our students on the job through a Co-operative Work Experience Program. Training in vocation areas has been structured to provide at least entry level skills for employment. However, any of the foregoing course areas may be taken for 5 semester hours of credit as a basic exploration of the field. Beyond this exploratory level all credit earned is expected to parallel acquisition of specific employable skills.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDENTS

Frequently, we are asked to describe our students, explore the reason that they left school; in short, characterize a "dropout" or at least those factors which stimulate early school leaving. Generally, our students could be observed as closely paralleling the representative population of the conventional schools. Previously established IQ test results are slightly above average with observed range from 69 to 158. We have had students from families of all professions and employment. Economic backgrounds of families have varied from second and third generations on some form of welfare to family incomes well in excess of $40,000 annually. The incident of dropout is higher among families experiencing economic deprivation, but is probably more related to the significance of education as seen by adult members of the home. Basically, the biggest single factor that we have noted among the student body are various forms of personal insecurity or instability. These are the outgrowth of broken homes, one parent homes, emotional problems of the student or family, health problems, frequent moves, loss of peer group association and similar situations.

The most predominant problem identifiable to academically related deficiencies is

a very high incidence of non-readers or substantial reading problems. Reading deficiencies make progress in all other academic subjects difficult and failure imminent. Faced with constant failure students lose confidence and withdraw. Few of our students have experienced success or recognition in athletics, scouts, student body activities, extra curricular activities or in any leadership role.

COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE SERVICE

There is extensive effort to provide personal, academic, social and vocational counseling in which we attempt to assist the student in establishing realistic goals and self-concepts for progress into the adult society. Counseling has been primarily individual, as it is our opinion that the complexity of personal problems experienced by the student and the existence of many severe emotional problems restrict the effectiveness of group method unless our work was extensively supplemented by psychiatric service.

We have avoided comprehensive entry testing, since most students who have experienced educational problems are not particularly responsive to the testing situation. The very able students may be highly test sophisticated. Their reaction is "test me and I'll show you how smart I am", to which our response is "what have you done or what can you do"? At the other end of the spectrum, the less able have proven to themselves, so often, that they are failures; that we certainly do not want to test them to further confirm their lack of confidence. We feel that as a substitute for such evaluation, highly experienced teachers, working in a very close individual relationship with each student, can more adequately evaluate their capabilities, needs, and growth potential. We, of course, are generally able to acquire substantial test results from previous schools for such use as we wish to make of it. After adequate rapport has been developed with the student we do use those tests

which may be individually helpful to a particular student. Tests are administered as a general policy only when the student desires to obtain information about himself.

With the close of the 1973-74 school year, we lost the services of an employment counselor of the State Department of Employment who assisted students in obtaining part or full-time employment to facilitate continuation of schooling. Terminating students were also assisted in seeking regular career employment. We have been in contact with the Colorado Employment Services during their reorganization, in an effort to obtain continuing service for our students. Nothing has been resolved at this time.

A nurse-practitioner provides medical services to include such matters as prenatal information, personal health and hygiene instruction, safety and counseling.

STAFF

Academic teachers meet full state certification requirements and North Central accreditation standards and most of the staff have had extensive classroom experience. Extensive experience is needed to provide a confidence level based upon which teachers can realistically exercise our philosophy of supporting each student's progress at his own individual rate. Also all evaluation of students' progress is highly subjective and we are extremely interested in the confidence which each faculty member can engender amoung the students with whom they are associated. While each teacher must be well versed in his/her subject matter area, we consider their individual relationship with students and their effectiveness in providing an adult figure with whom the student may relate as perhaps the most important factor in their success with the Center.

A substantial number of our staff members, in addition to their primary academic

preparation, have graduate study in psychology, counseling and guidance services or sociology.

Vocational teachers have extensive industrial experience in their respective fields and are state credentialed.

We will have a regular teacher and counseling staff of 40 certified personnel on contract to Denver Public Schools for the 1974-75 school year.

Two part-time academic employees are employed three hours each day. Eight vocationally credentialed personnel have been employed on an hourly basis, usually 6 hours per day, 5 days per week. With the 1974-75 school year, one of these teachers will convert to contract status. Others may qualify for contract status as additional educational preparation is achieved. In our early history all teachers were employed on an hourly basis subject to the needs of the students. With the transition to contract teachers, dictated by legislation, we suffered considerable restriction in flexible scheduling to meet student needs.

We have sought additional consideration in the assignment of teachers to Metropolition Youth Education Center, with a view of providing teacher excellence, as well as continuity of instruction and maximum flexibility.

ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

Four conditions are basic to enrollment. The first requirement is residence in either of the two supporting counties (school districts). We do not accept any tuition students or personnel who do not meet this residency requirement. The second criteria is age. Minimum age is normally 16 years which corresponds to the earliest age at which a student may legally leave school under compulsory attendance laws. In very unusual circumstances, with specific approval, this may be extended to 15 years. Maximum age has been 21. However, with the loss of E.S.E.A. - Title I

funding, we are now authorized to enroll students to age 26 under special circumstances. The 21 to 26 year group are highly responsive, well motivated, often employed and with families. We experience considerable success with this group and they provide a stabilizing influence to our younger students.

The next criteria is that of being a dropout. Any person presenting himself who has been out of school in excess of six months is enrolled without other referral. If the student has not been out of school at least six months he is referred by the administrator of the last school attended. Recommendations are usually based upon conditions involving individual hardship, such as: emotional disturbance, pregnancy, extensive accident, health, broken homes, or similar occurrance which may have interrupted the school year and which may be corrected through immediate integration into the Center enrollment. In general, we do not accept disciplinary cases directly from any of the conventional high schools, except where isolation of an individual or group may solve the problem.

Finally, the most important factor for enrollmnet is the individual evaluation of the student that involvement in the program will provide a successful educational experience.

PHYSICAL PLANT

The Center is currently operated at four geographic locations. The first operating site of the Center is located in a suburban area of 5590 West Twentieth Avenue. Transportation is poor, but location outside the heart of the metropolitan area is attractive to certain students who, for the most part, provide their own transportation to the Center. The buildings are frame, temporary structures, which include twelve small classrooms, office facilities, drafting room and electronics laboratory. Operated in conjunction with this location is a building which houses the automotive

maintenance, art and clothing design classes. The second location is in the heart of metropolitan Denver, at 1420 Kalamath Street, in an area very convenient to public transportation. This facility is rather interesting in itself, in that it is a pre-fabricated building designed specifically for school purposes. It includes thirteen academic classrooms, shops, and office facilities. This building was constructed under Title I - E.S.E.A. funding.

East Extension is being relocated to a leased facility at East 34th and Holly Street.

The fourth location is at 3555 Pecos Street where we share the second floor of a building with the North Side Community Center, from whom we lease six classrooms and office space. We feel that operating from temporary facilities is an essential and desirable position, both from the standpoint of students and the community. Since we were brought into existence to deal with the problem of the dropout, ideally, elimination of the problem is our constant goal. It provides a somewhat better public relations image to operate from simple and easily converted facilities. Classrooms are small, designed to accommodate no more than ten students. Each building can accommodate but a limited population and as we do expand our operations it has proved advantageous to operate more small facilities at diversified locations, rather than the establishment of any centralized large institution. We believe that the majority of students with whom we are associated will profit by the individualization which is stimulated out of these facilities in contrast to the large metropolitan high school complexes, which have spawned this particular group of dropouts.

FINANCING

Operating costs of Metropolitan Youth Education Center have been financed from three direct sources. Title I -E.S.E.A. provided a budget of approximately $215,000.00 annually. The Denver Public Schools and Jefferson County Public Schools expended approximately $700,000.00 in district funds directly in support of the program.

In that Denver administers and pays the bulk of personnel, Jefferson County reimburses Denver based upon the actual classroom hours that students from each county attending the Kalamath, Depew, and Pecos locations. With the 1974-75 school year, all Title I-E.S.E.A. funding has been withdrawn.

The system of financing has worked adequately to this point but any radical change in student participation within one district has a counter-reflective reaction to expenditures of the other district. It is generally felt revision in this method of fund management is indicated.

Substantial reimbursement of cost of vocational programs is provided by the State Department of Vocational Education. Minimal state aid is received by each district through computation of average daily attendance of those students under age 21.

SCHEDULING

Classes at the Kalamath location operate from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Friday. The Depew location has classes from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily, and on Tuesday and Thursday night from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m. The extension locations have only day classes. Students have completely free option to attend the Center of their choice.

Students may enroll at any time to start classes within twenty-four hours. There is no beginning or end to a specific term. There is no class or grade identification. Each student is scheduled to meet his specific educational need within the structure of personal time, home situation, ability, motivation, work schedule or health that may dictate limitation. Such individual sheduling can be accommodated by maintenance of small classes, usually 5 to 8 students, in which the teacher works individually with each student on his particular need and at their individual rate

of progress.

If employment, family situations, health, or other reasons develop that indicate necessity or desirability of schedule change such action is taken with the least possible delay and for the maximum convenience of the student.

Positive attendance of the student within the schedule which they establish is maintained on an in-class clock hour basis. We concern ourselves with the time that they are in contact with the Center and de-emphasize the significance of absence except as it restricts the student in completion of those goals which, again, he has established.

STATISTICS

Our initial classes opened in 1964 with a total of 32 students. As of June 15, 1974, our enrollment was 1307 students who received 14,640 class hours of instruction during the preceding thirty days.

Our student group is characterized by constant turnover, return of former students, etc. Within a twelve month period actual individual student contact represents in excess of 100% turnover. We have had 204 students successfully complete the GED and receive the high school diploma equivalency, and 258 students received formal high school diplomas during the past year. We also had 68 students participate successfully in the Cooperative Work Study Program during the 1973-74 school year, representing demonstrated success in the work world.